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INFORMATION

~~TOP SECRET~~

Monday, February 12, 1968
9:00 p.m.

Pres file

Mr. President:

Here is Gen. Westmoreland's
further reply to the questions asked
by Gen. Wheeler.

Bromley Smith

~~TOP SECRET~~

BKS:rlm

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4(b)

White House Guidelines, Feb. 24, 1983

Br. 178, NARA, Date 2/10/92

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INFO MR ROSTOW WHITE HOUSE WASH DC
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MR HELMS CIA
GEN JOHNSON CSA WASH DC
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ZEN/GEN CHAPMAN CMC WASH DC
O 121823Z ZYH ZFF-3
FM GEN WESTMORELAND
TO GENERAL WHEELER CJCS
INFO ADMIRAL SHARP CINCPAC
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TOP SECRET MAC 02018 EYES ONLY SECTION ONE OF TWO

REF: JCS 01695

1. FIRST, WITH REGARD TO THE INTERPRETATION WHICH
YOU HAVE PLACED ON MY EARLIER MESSAGE.

A. I AM EXPRESSING A FIRM REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL
TROOPS, NOT BECAUSE I FEAR DEFEAT IF I AM NOT REINFORCED,
BUT BECAUSE I DO NOT FEEL THAT I CAN FULLY GRASP THE
INITIATIVE FROM THE RECENTLY REINFORCED ENEMY WITHOUT
THEM. ON THE OTHER HAND A SET BACK IS FULLY POSSIBLE
IF I AM NOT REINFORCED AND IT IS LIKELY THAT WE WILL
LOSE GROUND IN OTHER AREAS IF I AM REQUIRED TO MAKE

SUBSTANTIAL REINFORCEMENT TO I CORPS.

B. THE STATUS OF THE ARVN IS HARD TO DETERMINE AT
THIS TIME. VIEN IS ENCOURAGED BY THE ABSENCE OF PENETRATION;
BY THE EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE OF HIS DIVISION COMMANDERS;
AND BY THE NUMBER OF TROOPS THAT ARE VOLUNTARILY REPORTING
INTO ARVN HEADQUARTERS FROM A LEAVE STATUS, TO TAKE THEIR
POSITIONS IN PROVISIONAL UNITS WHILE AWAITING RETURN TO THEIR
OWN ORGANIZATION. THE BIG QUESTION MARK IS THE RF/PF.
I HAVE ASKED FOR A COMPLETE STATUS REPORT BY 29 FEB. BY
THIS TIME THE TRUE ARVN SITUATION SHOULD BE SIFTED OUT.
IN THE MEANWHILE, I AM HOPING FOR THE BEST BUT RECOGNIZE
THAT THERE WILL BE MANY DIFFICULTIES.

C. THE CAPACITY OF OUR LOGISTIC SYSTEM IN NORTHERN
I CTZ MUST BE BUILT UP AS WE INCREASE THE TROOP DENSITY.
WE HAVE HAD VERY LITTLE MARGIN OVER OUR REQUIREMENTS. THEREFORE,
A FIRMLY CONTROLLED LAND LOC IS A NECESSARY ADJUNCT TO THE
SEA AND AIR LCC'S. HIGHWAY ONE IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO SUSTAIN
ADDITIONAL TROOPS NORTH OF AI VAN PASS. MY PLANS FOR REINFORCING
NORTHERN I CTZ INCLUDE OPENING THIS LOC.

D. THE NEED FOR TROOPS TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE WAS EXPRESSED

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Authority 0519 la 11/22/78

By pl, NARA, Date 2-12-92

IN PARAGRAPH A ABOVE.

2. THE FOLLOWING IS IN RESPONSE TO YOUR QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER OR NOT WE SHOULD CHANGE OUR STRATEGY.

3. I DO NOT PLAN TO CHANGE MY LOCAL STRATEGY. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN CENTERED ON DEFEATING THE ENEMY MAIN FORCES WHILE PROVIDING A SHIELD OF SECURITY BEHIND WHICH THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY COULD BE RE-ESTABLISHED. THIS HAD TO BE TIED IN CLOSELY--PARTICULARLY IN THE SECOND ASPECT--WITH THE ARVN FORCES.

4. CERTAINLY, THE MAJOR POLITICO - MILITARY OFFENSIVE WHICH THE ENEMY LAUNCHED AT TET HAS CAUSED US TO RE-EVALUATE OUR PRIORITIES. WE HAVE HAD TO REVISE OUR OFFENSIVE PLANS, ESPECIALLY IN III CTZ, AND FACE THE REALITIES OF THE CURRENT SITUATION. WE HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO DIVERT MORE SUPPORT TO THE ARVN IN PROTECTING THE POPULATED AREAS. THIS WAS DONE BEFORE THE TET AGGRESSION BASED ON INTELLIGENCE AND ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION.

5. I AGREE WITH THE OBSERVATION THAT CLEARING THE CITIES IS OF HIGHEST PRIORITY. TO THIS END THE ARVN ARE DEVOTING A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THEIR ASSETS. THIS IS REFLECTED IN THE DELTA WHERE A LARGE NUMBER OF CITIES HAVE BEEN ATTACKED, BUT HAVE BEEN CLEARED; IN SAIGON WHERE UP TO SIXTEEN GENERAL RESERVE BATTALIONS HAVE

BEEN EMPLOYED; THROUGHOUT II CTZ WHERE ALL OF THE CITIES HAVE BEEN CLEARED OF VC UNITS, AND IN HUE. IN MANY OF THESE ACTIONS, US FORCES HAVE BEEN COMMITTED. IN THE DELTA, AN ADDITIONAL US BRIGADE OF TWO BATTALIONS WAS REQUIRED TO SAVE THE SITUATION AT BEN TRE AND AT MY THO. THE MRF TONIGHT IS HEADING TOWARDS CAN THO TO STAVE OFF A THREAT TO THE CAPITOL. THIS IS THE FARTHEST SOUTH THAT THE MRF HAS BEEN COMMITTED. IN SAIGON, ONE OF OUR BATTALIONS IS IN THE CITY AND SEVERAL OTHERS ARE MANEUVERING AGAINST THE ENEMY FORCES THAT ARE IN THE AREA. DANANG IS ALMOST ENTIRELY PROTECTED BY US FORCES. IN HUE AND QUANG TRI, US ELEMENTS PARTICIPATED HEAVILY IN THE CLEARING OPERATIONS.

6. DESPITE THE HIGH PRIORITY ACCORDED TO THE CITIES, I STILL SEE THE ENEMY POSITION IN THE KHE SANH/DMZ AREA AS THE GREATEST SINGLE THREAT. IT MUST BE STOPPED OR ALL OF NORTHERN I CTZ WILL BE IN JEOPARDY. TO DEFEAT THIS ENEMY, WHO HAS CLOSE TO 50,000 TROOPS IN THE AREA, WE HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO DEPLOY 28 US BATTALIONS PLUS HEAVY COMBAT SUPPORT FORCES TO THAT SECTOR.

7. ALL OF THIS BRINGS US TO KHE SANH. SHOULD WE DEFEND THERE, OR WITHDRAW?

8. AS YOU KNOW, WE HAVE MAINTAINED OUR POSITION IN KHE SANH

THAT WE WOULD HAVE A FORWARD OPERATING BASE FROM WHICH WE COULD CONDUCT OPERATIONS AGAINST THE KEY INFILTRATION ROUTES IN EASTERN LAOS. BE SURE, OUR POSITION THERE HAS NOT STOPPED INFILTRATION. BUT THERE IS GOOD EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT IF WE HADN'T HELD AT KHE SANH THE ENEMY WOULD HAVE HAD CLEAR SAILING STRAIGHT DOWN TO QUANG TRI AND EVEN HUE WITH ALUTELY NOTHING IN HIS PATH FROM THE NORTH. THE WHOLE QUANG TRI POSITION WOULD HAVE BEEN FLANKED AND THE BATTLE FOR WHICH WE ARE NOW GIRDING AT KHE SANH WOULD BE ON OUR HANDS ALONG THE POPULATED BELT OF I CTZ. THIS IS NOT THE PREFERRED PLACE TO FIGHT SUCH BATTLES AS EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEK HAVE INDICATED.

NOTE: DELIVER DURING DUTY HOURS

~~TOP SECRET~~

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9. TWICE BEFORE KHE SANH HAS BEEN THREATENED. LAST SPRING AT LEAST TWO REGIMENTS MOVED AGAINST IT BUT WERE DRIVEN OFF. THIS TIME THE ENEMY BUILD UP HAS BEEN GREATER THAN BEFORE WHICH HEIGHTENS THE RISK. HOWEVER, TO WITHDRAW FROM KHE SANH WOULD HAVE CERTAIN TACTICAL DISADVANTAGES, AND WOULD BE A DIFFICULT MANEUVER. MUCH OF THE HEAVY EQUIPMENT ON BASE CAN ONLY BE EXTRACTED BY ROAD. FINALLY, THERE IS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF A WITHDRAWAL. TO DO SO NOW, AFTER THE RECENT VC SPLURGE IN THE CITIES, AND THE LOSS OF LANG VEI WOULD BE A HEAVY BLOW TO THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT OF SVN, AND POSSIBLY TO A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC. I

MUST HOLD THE POSITION AND I THINK WE WILL HOLD IT. ON THE OTHER HAND AS REPORTED TO YOU, I INTEND TO OPEN NY 9 WHICH WILL GIVE US A NUMBER OF OPTIONS AND COMPLICATE THE ENEMYS' PROBLEM.

10. LASTLY, WITH REGARD TO THE SUGGESTION THAT I PULL MY TROOPS OUT OF THE DELTA TO USE THEM AS A RESERVE, LEAVING THE DELTA TO ARVN. RIGHT NOW, AS I EXPLAINED ABOVE, WE ARE DEEPLY INVOLVED IN PROTECTING THE POPULATION CENTERS OF THE DELTA WITH THE COMBINATION OF US/ARVN FORCES. I HAD HOPED TO MOVE A TWO BATTALION BRIGADE UP TO LONG AN PROVINCE TODAY, BUT THE THREAT TO CAN THO CHANGED MY MIND. AS YOU ARE AWARE, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ONE TO BE VERY FAR FROM THIS BATTLEFIELD AND MAKE FINITE SUGGESTIONS AS TO WHAT SHOULD BE IN RESERVE. THE SITUATION CHANGES TOO RAPIDLY. I FIND THAT I MUST WEIGH EVERY PIECE OF EVIDENCE CAREFULLY AND CONTINUALLY RE-EVALUATE THE ALTERNATIVE I CAN REINFORCE ONE AREA FROM ANY OTHER AND THE DELTA IS NO EXCER

11. I WOULD BE PLEASED TO HAVE YOU VISIT